

“OP-ED”

Newspapers generally publish a page of guest opinion articles and letters opposite the editorial page, hence the term “opposite editorial” or “op-ed.” Op-ed pages are the arena in which ideas and issues are debated and an excellent place to raise awareness of issues such as air pollution and traffic congestion. Education and information programs, such as *It All Adds Up To Cleaner Air*, are good candidates for placement in the op-ed pages.

Writing an op-ed places you in the role of a reporter who is presenting the facts. Whether you use the sample provided or write your own, here are some tips for writing an op-ed:

- Begin by making an outline — it will help you stay focused and act as a reminder to cover key points.
- Stick with one subject per submission.
- Your op-ed should express an opinion and be clear and well-stated from the beginning.
- Don’t assume your readers are aware of your viewpoint. Give them enough background information to help them follow your logic.
- Support your position with statistics or study results, but don’t bury them in numbers.
- Use appropriate anecdotes; reference a recent news event or story.
- Localize your story whenever possible.
- Be clear and firm, but not fanatical, in your approach.
- Keep your op-ed to 800 words or less. Less is more.
- At the end, include an “authorship line,” which has your full name, a brief description of who you are and what you do that makes you an expert on the subject.

Ascertain the name of the appropriate party to contact, usually the editorial page editor. The newspaper’s policy will probably be for you to send or fax a copy of the op-ed. It should be accompanied by a letter that explains who you are and provides some background information about the topic. It should briefly but clearly state the issue and why your thoughts on the subject are important. Give your package time to arrive and then call to make sure it was received and to answer any questions. If you are linking the op-ed to an event or special occasion, such as “Clean Air Month,” begin about a month before the event.

Sample Op-Ed Article

WHAT YOU CAN'T SEE CAN HURT YOU!

Sometimes, what you can't see can hurt you. Take air pollution, for example. When someone mentions air pollution, many of us think of smog, leaden skies, and air that makes breathing difficult. Yet, not all air pollution is so visibly and dramatically present. It takes only 0.12 parts per million of ozone to pollute the air. Carbon monoxide is colorless and odorless, but it also is poisonous and can cause health problems by reducing the amount of oxygen delivered to the body's organs and tissues. So even though the sky seems clear, a community can have air pollution problems. Right here in *(community name)*, we have an air quality problem that needs attention. *(Insert local statistics demonstrating problem)*. Much of this pollution comes from our cars and trucks.

But there is good news for *(community name)*. By working together we can help solve our air quality problem. In fact, many members of our community are already taking steps to help improve our air quality and reduce traffic congestion. One of the important actions they've taken is to begin educating the public about how they can reduce traffic congestion and vehicle emissions that cause air pollution. The *(name of coalition)*, made up of *(identify coalition membership)*, has several goals:

(list goals, for example:

- X *Educate friends and neighbors about the relationship between local transportation and air pollution issues*
- X *Encourage individual choices that can help reduce air pollution and traffic congestion)*

Many areas around the country have made great strides toward attaining cleaner air. Automakers have cooperated by designing cars that are cleaner than ever before. Many factories have reduced practices that result in air pollution. But much remains to be done. If each of us travels smarter, we can contribute to cleaner air in *(community name)*. How? By taking such simple actions as combining errands in a single trip, choosing alternative forms of transportation such as buses and trains, sharing a ride to work or school activities, and keeping our vehicles well-maintained so they burn energy more efficiently. Some of these practices result in real cost savings. For example, a well-maintained car has lower repair bills, lower fuel bills, and lasts longer.

The *(coalition or organization name)* recently kicked off a public information program called *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air*. This program encourages easy-to-take personal actions that contribute to cleaner air and less traffic congestion. Radio and television advertisements point out that simple changes in travel choices can and will make a difference. The initiative materials were developed in partnership with the U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

(Community name) is part of an expanding national effort to support innovative solutions to pollution-related issues at the local level. The *(coalition or organization name)* plans to make people more aware of these issues through activities such as *(list activities)* which will take place *(insert dates as appropriate)*. The *(coalition or organization name)* welcomes your involvement and invites you to become an active participant in the ongoing effort to improve our community's air quality and reduce our traffic congestion. For more information about this program *(write or call: insert local information)*.

Note: At the end of the op-ed include an “authorship line,” with the full name and title of your local-organization or coalition spokesperson. If this is not sufficient to show why the person is an authority on the subject, the authorship line should also include some relevant background.